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ABSTRACT

Several authorities have observed that a moderate degree of conformity by the young may be necessary for a society to function effectively. In order to examine the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of parental power and behavior and adolescent conformity, adolescents (N=368) in 184 families completed questionnaires concerning aspects of parental behavior (companionship, affection, love withdrawal, induction, coercion) and parental power (expert power, legitimate power, reward power, coercive power). Data analyses indicated gender differences in adolescent conformity related to parental power. Sons responded with greater conformity to parents seen as having coercive power. Daughters tended to respond to parents perceived as having legitimate and expert power. The results also showed gender differences in adolescent conformity in relation to parental behavior. Physical affection was positively related to conformity, mainly in father-daughter and mother-son relationships. Induction (parental behavior intended to elicit voluntary compliance through reasoning) seemed to be most effective in father-son and mother-daughter relationships. (AG)

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Parental Power and Behaviors as Antecedents of Adolescent Conformity*

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A fundamental issue in the socialization of family members concerns the dimensions of the parent-child realtionship that predict the conformity of adolescents to their parents (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1978; Becker, 1964; Hoffman, 1970, 1980; Martin, 1975; Rollins & Thomas, 1975, 1979; Staub, 1979; Steinmetz, 1979; Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, & Rooney, 1974). As a child enters adolescence, a central task for parents is to use child-rearing approaches that encourage adolescents to achieve a balance between conformity and independence (Aldous, 1978; Baumrind, 1975; Hollander, 1975; Kandel & Lesser, 1972; Richer, 1968). The process of becoming responsive to parental expectations (conformity) is a central process of socialization during adolescence and is a vital part of the process of moving into young adulthood (Hoffman, 1970; Rollins & Thomas, 1975, 1979). The purpose of this study was to examine how several parental characteristics predict adolescent conformity.

Social scientists frequently observe that parents are primarily responsible for introducing youth into cooperative participation in groups as part of the socialization process (Baumrind, 1978, 1980; Reiss, 1965; Thomas, Gecas, Weigert, & Rooney, 1975). Several authorities have observed that a moderate degree of conformity by the young is necessary in order for a society to function effectively (Hogan, 1975; Inkeles, 1968). Frequently, social observers have expressed the concern that neither our existing social mechanisms nor the social sciences sufficiently emphasize the need for interdependent cooperation and conformity to norms (Bronfenbrenner, 1970; Hogan, 1975; Inkeles & Smith, 1974). Given the importance of these issues for family life and society in general, the purpose of this study was to examine the

relationship between certain dimensions of the parent-adolescent relationship and conformity.

Throughout the child and adolescent periods of human development, expectations for conformity to social agents are conveyed to young people through several dimensions of the parent-youth relationship (Baumrind, 1978; Thomas et al., 1974). Responsiveness to social agents (e.g., parents) may eventually become part of a youth's internalized motive system (Hoffman, 1960).

In this study, a theoretical model derived from social power theory was developed to examine the relationship between selected parental variables and adolescent conformity (French & Raven, 1959; Rollins & Thomas, 1975, 1979; Smith, 1790). Social power can be defined as the potential of one person to exert a force towards change in another person (Henderson, 1980; Smith, 1970). McDonald (1979) suggests that power can be not only interactional but also situational and socioemotional in character. Measures of the adolescent's perception of their parents' potential power and measures of the adolescent's report of parental behaviors which are expected to influence conformity are examined in this study (see Figure 1). In other words, the present model examines the effect of independent variables that represent both the parent's potential ability to influence (power) and actual attempts (parental behavior) to influence the adolescent. Previous studies have studied these two forms of influence separately.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Four of the nine independent variables in the model consist of parental power variables which are adolescent self-reports of their parents' potential to influence. The first of these is expert power which refers to the adolescent's perception of the parent's special knowledge or abilities to render aid toward his or her desired goal. Another power dimension is legitimate power which is derived from the adolescent's perception of the parent's right to solicit compliance. Reward power and coercive power are the adolescent's perceptions of the parent's potential capacity to reward or punish with the appropriate control of valued resources.

The multidimensional nature of parental power is conceptualized as having different power bases (Cromwell & Olsen, 1975; French & Raven, 1959; McDonald, 1979) which are qualitatively distinct, but not totally independent dimensions. Parental power dimensions in this model refer to the parents' potential rather than actual ability to influence the socialization outcomes of adolescents. Defined in this manner, parental power is a function of the adolescent's perception concerning the situational aspects, socioemotional history, and instrumental history of the parent-adolescent relationship (Cartwright, 1959; French & Raven, 1959; McDonald, 1979; Rollins & Thomas, 1975; Smith, 1970). Parental power emerges from these complex conditions within the relationship and determines the adolescent's willingness to be influenced (Peterson & Rollins, in press). That is, parental power is an overall assessment by the adolescent of a parent's potential competence in several dimensions of their relationship and does not refer to objective attributes or to observable behaviors that parents direct at them.

Ideas from social power theory are consistent with the expectation that the more parental power, the higher the likelihood that adolescents will identify with and conform to the expectations of parents (McDonald, 1979, 1980; Rollins & Thomas, 1975, 1979). Power can be thought of as a resource which is a function of the person's perception of who is influenced. As the capacity to reward, to punish, to render expert information, and to rightfully influence is perceived to increase, adolescent conformity to parents is expected to increase.

Besides parental power dimensions, five independent variables in the model are adolescent reports of the parental behaviors. Specifically, these parental support behaviors (companionship and physical affection) and control behaviors (induction, coercion, and love withdrawal) refer to actual influence attempts which parents direct at adolescnets as a means of gaining their conformity. The first of these variables, parental companionship, refers to parental attention and involvement with the adolescent. Another variable, parental affection, conceptualizes the physical expression of support by parents. Love withdrawal, on the other hand, is a parental behavior that is used to express disapproval by implying that parental love will be withheld from the adolescent temporarily. A fourth behavior is induction which is a parental behavior that is intended to elicit voluntary compliance by such appeals as reasoning and pointing out the consequences of the child acts for himself (herself) and others. The fifth parental behavior, coercion, is the arbitrary use of force by parents which seeks to gain the compliance of adolescents (see Figure 1).

Parental behaviors represent the adolescent's perception of actual influence attempts. Parental support, for example, makes the child feel comfortable in the presence of the parent. Support is perceived as an affirmation of, acceptance of, and approval of the child by the parent and is, therefore, expected to have a positive relationship with conformity (Thomas et al., 1974). Control attempts, on the other hand, are the adolescent's perception of the parent's actual attempts to influence the child in a manner that meets the parent's expectations. Separate dimensions of parental control predict different results with reference to conformity. Induction, for example, is expected to be positively related to conformity, while coercive parental behaviors and love withdrawal are expected to be negatively related to adolescent conformity (Rollins & Thomas, 1979).

METHOD

Sample

A stratified random sample of families was selected from the identified population of junior and senior high school students in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. To be included in the sample, families were required to be intact families, have at least two adolescents in the age range of 14-18 years (one adolescent attending junior high school and the other adolescent attending high school), and be of normal intellectual, emotional, and social capacity. These criteria produced a total of 787 families having 1,574 teenagers that qualified for the present study.

These 787 families were then classified into four strata according to sex and ordinal position of the member adolescents as follows: families

with (1) two male adolescents (206 families); (2) two female adolescents (189 families); (3) the older adolescent being a male and the younger a female (196 families); and (4) the older adolescent being a female and the younger a male (196 families).

Eighty-seven families within each of these four family types (a total of 348 families) were randomly selected and asked to participate in the study. Of the 348 families, 184 (53%) agreed to appointments, were visited in their homes by two experimenters, and produced usable data. In 43 of the families, both adolescents were male, while in 44 families both teenagers were female. For families having teenagers of both genders, the son was older than the daughter in 49 families, while the daughter was older than the son in 48 of the families.

Measurement of Variables

Self-report questionnaires which concerned parental behavior and parental power were administered to 368 adolescents by two experimenters in the subject's homes. Operationalizing the measures of parental behavior (Schaefer, 1965), parental power (Smith, 1970), and adolescent conformity (Thomas et al., 1974) involved a refinement of previously established instruments. A separate principal components factor analysis with orthogonal rotation was applied to each set of responses by the present sample to the items composing the measures of parental behavior, parental power, and adolescent conformity to parental expectations. Each factor was identified from the items with factor loadings of .40 or above and an internal consistency reliability of coefficient referred to as "Cronbach's Alpha" was calculated for each emergent dimension

(Bornstedt, 1971). All of the factors used for this study demonstrated structural equivalence for both males and females as well as parents and adolescents. Factor scores were constructed and used for the analysis.

The self-report measure of conformity was used in a previous cross-national investigation (Thomas et al., 1974) and included 10 items asking adolescents if they would conform to parent's expectations in several areas (i.e., dress, choice of entertainment, friends, school attendance, educational goals, career goals, and marriage). The adolescents filled out anonymous questionnaires in separate rooms where parents could not monitor their responses. From a three factor solution, a single general conformity factor was identified having an internal consistency reliability coefficient of .74 which accounted for 48% of the explained variance after varimax rotation.

The five self-report parental behaviors were selected from a 16 factor solution to an 80 item revision of Schaefer's (1965) Parent Behavior Inventory (PBI) that was given to the present sample. The resulting self-report instrument was designed to measure several parental behaviors, among which were companionship, physical affection, induction, coercion, and love withdrawal. A series of factor analyses applied to item responses by a pilot sample reduced the original 192 item Parent Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, 1965) and resulted in 55 items used for the present study. This group of items was then combined with a nine item scale constructed in another factor analytic study comparing the Heilbrun and Cornell measures of parental support (Ellis et al., 1976). An additional 16 items were developed through pilot studies on an initial set of 64 items designed to measure parental induction (Hoffman, 1970).

The factors identified from the final factor analysis as companionship, physical affection, induction, coercion, and love withdrawal had respective internal consistency reliability coefficients of .81, .81, .86, .85, and .74. These dimensions accounted for 8%, 5.6%, 11.6%, 9.2%, and 6.2% of the variance explained by the 16 factors after varimax rotation.

The expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive power dimensions of parental power were identified from a 6 factors solution for the responses to 27 items designed to measure parental power in such areas as future occupational goals, educational matters, and relations with the opposite sex (French & Raven, 1959; Smith, 1970). Respectively, these factors demonstrated internal consistency reliability coefficients of .79, .76, .76, and .76 for expert, legitimate, reward, and coercive power, while accounting for 17%, 18%, 18%, and 10.6% of the explained variance after varimax rotation.

Analysis

Multiple regression and bivariate correlations were employed to test the hypothesized theoretical model concerning the parental antecedents of adolescent conformity to parental expectations. Nine independent variables consisting of four parental power, five parental behavior (two support behaviors and three control behaviors), sex of parent, and the sex of adolescent variables were entered simultaneously into each equation (see Figure 1). Standardized and unstandardized betas (see Table 1) were tested for statistical significance ($p<.05$). The multiple R, adjusted R, and R^2 were examined to evaluate the predictive strength of each of four regression models.

Insert Table 1 about here

RESULTS

The findings of this study support the notion that adolescent sons and daughters conform differentially in response to dimensions of parental power and behavior demonstrated by mothers and fathers. A summary of the results follows.

1. In the statistical model which examines father's parental characteristics with respect to adolescent son's conformity to parental expectations, coercive power and the use of induction were positively related to conformity, while coercive behaviors were negatively related to conformity.
2. In the statistical model which examines father's parental characteristics with respect to adolescent daughter's conformity to parental expectations, companionship and physical affection were positively related to conformity.
3. In the statistical model which examines mother's parental characteristics with respect to adolescent son's conformity to parental expectations, coercive power and the use of physical affection were positively related to conformity.
4. In the statistical model which examines mother's parental characteristics with respect to adolescent daughter's conformity to parental expectations, expert power, legitimate power, the use of induction, and companionship were positively related to conformity, while the use of coercion and love withdrawal were negatively related.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study clearly support the influence of parental behaviors and parental power on adolescent conformity. In accordance with social power theory, the varying degrees of conformity are interpreted as related to the amount of power perceived to be held by the parent. That is, the more the adolescent percevies the parent as having power to influence his or her behavior, the more responsiveness to parents will occur (McDonald, 1977, 1980; Rollins & Thomas, 1975). Furthermore, parental influence attempts also contribute to adolescent conformity.

The results of the present study clearly demonstrate gender related differences with respect to parental power. In general, this data reflects a traditional distinction between the antecedents of conformity in adolescent sons and daughters. Sons respond with greater conformity to parents who are seen as having coercive power (i.e., the ability to force conformity). Daughters tend to respond to parents perceived as having legitimate and expert power. That is, sons show greater levels of conformity when they see parents as having the ability to force conformity, while daughters conform to parents seen as having the right and ability to direct their lives through normative or informational capacities.

The gender related differences, with respect to adolescent conformity to parental expectations, are further demonstrated in relation to parental behavior. Companionship seemed to be the most effective predictor of conformity in adolescent daughters. Physical affection, a support behavior, showed significance for opposite gender parents. That is, physical affection is positively related to conformity primarily with

father-daughter and mother-son relationships. Induction, a dimension of parental control seems to be most effective in the father-son and mother-daughter relationships. The use of coercive behaviors was negatively related to conformity in the father-son and mother-daughter relationships. Based on these findings, it is possible to suggest that the types of parent behaviors most effective in leading to adolescent conformity should be considered in the light of gender differences.

In general, the present study provides evidence that fathers serve as the primary controlling agent for sons. In the case of adolescent son's conformity to parental expectations, coercive power with fathers is strongly associated with conformity, while the use of coercive behaviors is negatively related to conformity. Goode (1972), for example, states that controlling the behavior of another (i.e., conformity to parental expectations) is more effective when the threat of force is present than when actual force is employed. Thus, adolescent sons who see their fathers as having the ability and resources to exert control over their behavior are more likely to conform, than if the father actually attempts to force the son to conform.

Coercive power is also related to conformity in sons with respect to mothers. Yet, no significant relationship was found between the mother's use of coercion and conformity in adolescent sons. This finding raises the question as to why coercive power is related to adolescent son's conformity to parental expectations with respect to fathers and mothers, while the negative relationship between the use of coercive behaviors and conformity exists only with fathers. One possible explanation is that in families with traditional sex roles, as appear in the present

sample, coercive behaviors may actually be employed more frequently by fathers than by mothers. Thus, fathers attempt to influence sons through coercion, while mothers provide support through using physical affection. The present findings are consistent with previous research investigating the differences in mother-son and father-son interactions (Biller, 1981).

In the same way that fathers are the primary controlling agents for sons, mothers are the primary controlling agents for daughters. The mother-daughter relationship appears to predict female adolescent conformity through the use of positive behaviors such as providing logical explanations for control attempts (induction) and spending time together (companionship). Daughters who perceive their mothers as having the right to influence their behaviors seem to conform to parental expectations more frequently. Furthermore, in families where daughters see their mothers as having valuable information on important issues, greater conformity is found. These findings are consistent with Biller's (1981) assertion that feminine development is facilitated if the mother is seen as a generally salient controller of resources. As daughters relate more with their mothers, greater conformity exists.

The father-daughter relationship in this study indicates the importance of a strong affectional bond. Fathers are important in developing warmth and affection in daughters based on a nurturant relationship (Biller, 1981). Previous studies indicate that fathers who are warm and supportive of their daughters tend to encourage achievement and independence in daughters (Biller, 1974; Biller & Meredith, 1974). Consistent with these results, the present study provided evidence that the nurturant relation between fathers and daughters appeared to be critical

in the conformity of adolescent daughters to parental expectations. This affectional bond is demonstrated through the use of physical affection and companionship by fathers.

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Table 1

Parental Behaviors and Power and Adolescent Conformity: A Summary of Multiple Regressions and Bivariate Correlations

Predictive Variables	Son's Conformity to Father			Son's Conformity to Mother			Daughter's Conformity to Father			Daughter's Conformity to Mother		
	r	B	b	r	B	b	r	B	b	r	B	b
Parental Behaviors												
Companionship	.10	.08	.73	.16	.14	.13	.24*	.18*	.16	.23*	.15*	.16
Physical Affection	.05	-.06	-.64	.15*	.15*	.14	.21*	.15*	.17	.12	.10	.11
Induction	.24*	.22*	.20	.18	.14	.14	23	.13	.12	.23*	.17*	.18
Coercion	-.21*	-.27*	-.23	-.13	-.14	-.13	-.05	-.08	-.72	-.16*	-.18*	-.17
Love Withdrawal	.06	-.08	-.75	.01	.02	.16	-.14	-.12	-.12	-.19*	-.15*	-.13
Power Variables												
Coercive Power	.22*	.28*	.26	.20*	.20*	.19	.08	.11	.11	.02	.10	.97
Expert Power	.06	.00	.18	.85	.05	.54	.19	.06	.60	.24*	.15*	.15
Legitimate Power	.06	-.02	-.18	.75	.08	.70	.17	.12	.14	.20*	.16*	.17
Reward Power	.11	.04	.39	.04	.00	.65	.09	.03	.33	.07	.01	.14
Multiple Correlation (R)			.43			.38			.41			.46
Adjusted Multiple Correlation			.14			.15			.13			.17
Multiple Correlation Squared (R^2)			.18			.10			.17			.21
F-Value			4.30*			3.32			3.93*			5.17*

* P<.05

b = unstandardized beta

B = standardized beta

Figure 1

Parental Antecedents of Adolescent Conformity